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**Environment Department Alerts Southern New Mexico Residents of  
Dust Storm Health Impacts**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Air Quality Bureau is warning the citizens of Southern New Mexico of the potential health risks associated with dust storms.

Dust storms are a common spring occurrence in Southern New Mexico. In **Dona Ana, Chaves, Lea and Luna Counties** dust from storms has exceeded national health-based air standards for dust exposure in the past. The National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size is designed to protect humans from dust and other particulates about 1/7 the diameter of a human hair.

A combination of weather conditions, features of the natural environment, and human activity can create high levels of windblown dust, or dust storms. High-speed winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. In southern New Mexico, strong winds are most common during the spring and early summer months.

Dust storms can exacerbate existing health problems and cause new health problems. Dust can irritate the lungs, cause coughing, wheezing, and runny noses, and trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks. For people with pre-existing respiratory conditions, dust can cause serious breathing problems. Breathing large amounts of dust for prolonged periods can result in chronic breathing and lung problems.

Breathing too much dust has potential to harm anyone. However, dust storms create the highest risks for infants, children, and teens, the elderly, people with respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis and emphysema, people with heart disease, and pregnant women.

The most effective precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If you must go outside, spend as little time outside as possible, avoid vigorous exercise and wear covering over the nose and mouth to provide protection from larger dust particles.

For more information about the risks associated with dust storms, please see the NMED's website at: [www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/NEAP/index.html](http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/NEAP/index.html), or contact Andy Berger, Environmental Analyst, NMED Air Quality Bureau at (505) 955-8034, or Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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